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Sexual Misconduct and Personnel Management

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Abstract. This paper describes how organizations might best understand and employ the concept of sexual misconduct.

Military and civilian organizations engage in personnel determinations which at times are based on a general concept of sexual misconduct. However, the concept is understood and employed differently by different organizations and personnel within the same organization. Even the same individual may understand and employ the concept differently at different times.

Some of the above inconsistencies are based on situational influences and on fluctuations in cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral functioning at the individual, group, organizational, and even larger contextual levels. These contributors to inconsistency might be more easily managed if explicit and simple guidelines on sexual misconduct were developed by organizational authorities. As an example of what now passes for a variant of an explicit and simple guideline is the exhortation to maintain a zero tolerance of sexual harassment. As with another prescription of only engaging in safe sex, the problem is in the nondefinition or inadequate definition of terms. The following material is suggestive of what might entail components of a sexual misconduct policy.

Introduction. Sexual functioning comprises thoughts, feelings, motives, and behaviors contributing to physical attraction towards the self or others. There is no aspect of sexual functioning which by itself is grounds for an organization declaring sexual misconduct and taking a personnel action. However, there may be grounds based on additional information--here termed disqualifying conditions.

Disqualifying conditions. Illegal Behavior. An aspect of sexual functioning is illegal in a specific jurisdiction and the violation of law suggests that the applicant has a significant likelihood of violating laws, regulations, and policies hindering the organization's purpose.

Shameful Behavior. An individual is ashamed of an aspect of sexual functioning, goes to significant lengths to keep others from discovering it, and is thereby susceptible to acting through the real or imagined pressure of others in a manner detrimental to the organization's purpose.

Inappropriate Association. An aspect of sexual functioning involves other people, places, or things whose absence makes sexual satisfaction, absent, difficult, or lessened and their access is controlled by people hostile to the organization's purpose. Susceptibility to pressure then becomes an issue as in shameful behavior above.

Psychiatric Diagnosis. An aspect of sexual functioning indicates a psychiatric diagnosis and the diagnosis itself suggests the significant likelihood of hindering the organization's purpose.

Psychological Functioning. An aspect of sexual functioning indicates psychological characteristics that do not warrant a psychiatric diagnosis but do suggest the significant likelihood of hindering the organization's purpose, e.g., significant compulsiveness, impulsivity, or narcissism).

The organizations that employ the concept of sexual misconduct in personnel management systems might want to follow an approach--like the above--that is closely linked to organizational purpose. The above approach is also conducive to developing nomological nets illustrating the nexus of sexual functioning to organizational functioning, actual examples, and training manuals. And it is less likely to induce in a most egregious sort of sexual misconduct--employing the sexual misconduct concept as a smoke screen, pretext, or red herring during bureaucratic infighting, power grabs, and personal conflicts.

Yet, even with this approach, the concept of sexual misconduct will still serve as an interorganizational weapon to hinder adversaries and help allies. This will most likely occur within environments in which (1) power imbalances between the sexes are formally proscribed or viewed as noxious but are being combated only partially or (2) anhedonic or puritanical tendencies too easily hinder organizational purpose. (See Beaton, A.M., Tougas, F., & Joly, S. (1996.) Neosexism among male managers: Is it a matter of numbers? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 26, 2189-2203; Farnsworth, S.R. (1994.) The roles of sex and gender in the perception, interpretation, and evaluation of upward influence attempts in organizations: Implications for human resource activities. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 54(11-A), 4169; Hartman, S.J., Fok, L.Y., Crow, S.M., & Payne, D.M. (1994.) Males and females in a discipline situation: Exploratory research on competing hypotheses. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 6, 54-68; Moore, M.P. (1996.) Rhetorical subterfuge and "the principle of perfection": Bob Packwood's response to sexual misconduct charges. *Western Journal of Communication*, 60, 1-20; Sederer, L.I., & Libby, M. (1995.) False allegations of sexual misconduct: Clinical and institutional considerations. *Psychiatric Services*, 46, 160-163; Smikle, C.B., Fiedler, E., Sorem, K.A., & Spencer, D.K. (1996.) The impact of sexual abuse on job attrition in military recruits. *Military Medicine*, 161, 146-148.) (Keywords: Personnel Security, Sexual Misconduct.)